support for India's claim for such permanent membership of the Security Council; and

(c) the steps taken/being taken for securing permanent membership of the Security Council?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) to (c) During his recent visit to India, the German Foreign Minister made positive statements about India's candidature. Discussions of Security Council re-structuring are continuing in the Open Ended Working Group of the UN General Assembly. So far there is no consensus on individual candidates or criteria for expansion. Mauritius, Bhutan, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Lao PDR have made statements at the UN in support of India's candidature for permanent membership. The Government is also in touch with other Member States both bilaterally and at the UN. We have indicated that any proposal to expand the Council should be comprehensive in nature, and non-discriminatory.

Expulsion of Indian Diplomats by America

1233. SHRI SANJAY NIRUPAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the U.S. has expelled two Indian diplomats recently for their alleged activities incompatible with their consular status, if so, the details thereof and the implication thereof;

(b) the action Government proposed to take;

(c) the details of Indian diplomats expelled from different countries; country-wise during last two years; year-wise; and

(d) the action taken against the officials expelled?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The US authorities have recently requested withdrawal of two Indian diplomats stationed in the United States alleging activities incompatible with their consular status. In a statement issued on 17 February, the Government of India have expressed deep regret at this decision. The individuals concerned were discharging their normal responsibilities as Consular Officers. Government of India has categorically rejected any implication to the contrary. The concerned officials will be returning to India shortly.

(c) The Government of Pakistan has, during the last two years, declared the following non-diplomatic India based officials posted in the Indian High Commission in Pakistan as persona-non-grata, under the false allegation that they were indulging in activities incompatible with their official status.

(i) A.C. Sinha, staff member, HCI Islamabad (1/10/1996)

(ii) A.K. Wahi, staff member, HCI Islamabad (26/10/1996)

Government of India has, in these cases of expulsion of our personnel from Pakistan, categorically rejected the Pakistani allegations. Government have conveyed to Pakistan that its actions in this regard are totally unacceptable and that use of violence by Pakistani intelligence operatives against Indian Mission personnel based in Pakistan is a matter of deep regret and serious concern. Government have also demanded that Government of Pakistan take all necessary steps for the safety of our personnel in Pakistan.

(d) Does not arise in view of the false allegations levelled against the non-diplomats that they were indulging in activities incompatible with their official status.

Opening of new Passport Office in Bihar

1234. SHRI GYAN RANJAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to open new passport offices and collection centres in Bihar; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

External Publicity on Kashmir Issue

1235. SHRI ANANTRAY DEVSHANKER DAVE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the external publicity being made by India on Kashmir issue has not proved as effective as that of Pakistan as far as influencing of other countries is concerned, particularly Islamic countries;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor and the steps being taken by the Government in this regard;

(c) whether Government have sent any delegations abroad in this regard; and

(d) if so, the countries that were visited by these delegations alongwith the results achieved therefrom?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL) (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) and (d) Government have not sent any delegations exclusively for this purpose, but most Government delegations visiting abroad utilise the opportunity to brief their foreign interlocutors about Kashmir in addition to discussing other issues of mutual interest. The delegations apprise the concerned Governments and other individuals and organisations who shape opinion and influence decisions, including the mass media, of the factual position on the Kashmir issue, as well as details of Pak sponsored terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, and the realities of the ground situation in the State. There is appreciation of Government of India's position, policy of transparency and determination to ensure that the people of Jammu and Kashmir are able to enjoy the benefits of a secular, representative democratic polity, as well as appreciation for holding elections in Jammu & Kashmir.

Visa to NRI

1236. SHRI BRAHMAKUMAR BHATT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a number of Gujarati NRIs after marriage with Indian girls are facing difficulty in taking their newly married wives to America and other European countries due to visa problem; and

(b) if so, whether Government propose to take up this issue with the U.S. Government for the issue of necessary visa in respect of the newly wedded couples?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) No specific incident of Gujarati NRIs' spouses facing difficulty in obtaining visas to America and other European countries has come to our notice. As per US Immigration Law, all spouse cases for permanent residence in the US are processed separately for grant of visas by the US Embassy. This applies uniformly to spouses not only from all over India but from several other countries as well. Some West European countries take time to process visas for Indian spouses applying to join their husbands/wives.

(b) Since issue of visa is a matter of sovereign policy, Government of India cannot take this up but the Ministry of External Affairs does try to help when inordinate delays are brought to its notice.

US Pressure on Indo-Russian Nuclear Deal

1237. SHRI O.P. KOHLI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news reports regarding US pressure on Indo-Russian nuclear deal; and

(b) if so, the reaction of Government thereto?